



03/08/2021

Dear Senator Anwar, Representative Linehan and respected members of the Committee on Children,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding SB2: An Act Concerning Social Equity and the Health, Safety and Education of Children. I am writing today to express Creative Interventions, LLC's (CI) strong support for Section 15 of SB2 which aims to expand Birth to Three services and eliminate the parent fee for these services.

CI is an agency dedicated to improving the lives of individuals. We began providing services to children and families, in home, community, clinic and school based settings in 2004 and expanded to Birth to Three in 2008. Our mission is to enhance the everyday lives of children and their families, while always recognizing the individual's distinct talents. Through our contract with the Office of Early Childhood, Creative Interventions provides Birth to Three services to families in over 60 towns and cities and employs an average of 125 providers.

CI currently provides Birth to Three services to over 500 families. Through our Birth to Three program, we are able to provide families with early intervention services including diagnostic assessments, developmental evaluations, early intervention services by licensed and certified professional staff, and service coordination services such as support in transitioning to a local school district. Our highly trained providers offer Birth to Three services that focus on parent/guardian training and we follow a coaching model to encourage caregiver implementation of strategies.

Expanding Birth to Three to age five:

CI is in support of expanding the Birth to Three system in a way that enhances the relationship between school districts and Birth to Three providers. Expanding the program to age five would have financial implications for the overall system. To reduce the financial impact, the program can be systematically implemented beginning with those children whose birthdays are between the months of May and August.

The expansion of Birth to Three services for children with summer birthdays is supported by a report developed by the Preschool Education Workgroup (established under P.A. 19-184) in 2019. This report identified positive benefits when allowing families of children with summer birthdays to remain in their Birth to Three program until the school year starts. Benefits include allowing a smooth transition from Birth to Three to the public school, providing one transition into school at the beginning of the school year and continuity of services over the summer both for children who do or do not qualify for preschool special education services.

Expanded Birth to Three support was offered this past summer during the pandemic as many schools were closed in the spring of 2020. The Office of Early Childhood and the Department of Education worked together to support the continuation of Birth to Three services for children who turned three between the spring and summer of 2020. This allowed Birth to Three programs to work closely with school districts during the transition and to provide ongoing support to families who otherwise would have not received any special education services. This practice received positive feedback from families and providers and allowed the system to identify the possibilities of service continuity for children with summer birthdays. With this information, we are writing today to ask your support for the expansion of Birth to Three to include children with summer birthdays.

Eliminating Family Cost Participation Fee

Creative Interventions is in support of the elimination of this fee. Charging families a fee based on income leads to inequitable services across eligible families with a specific impact on middle class working families. In the spring of 2020, The Governor temporarily eliminated family fees through executive order. Anecdotaly, many families expressed gratitude for this and stated that elimination of this fee was a relief as they struggled with loss of jobs and income. Prior to the executive order, many families found the fee a barrier to services. Some families would opt not to start with Birth to Three services due to the fee and many families choose to receive only Service Coordination services which result in a monthly phone call and quarterly face to face visit which is substantially lower than the 9 hours a month of services that the average child in Birth to Three receives. Additionally, access to early intervention saves the state money over time as every dollar invested in Birth to Three programs saves the State \$12 per year in terms of special education service needs in the future. Research has proven time and time again that early identification and intervention are crucial to the long-term outcomes for children with special needs, therefore it is of the utmost importance that we look to remove any barriers to accessing these services.

In FY19, the family fee accounted for just 2% of the overall annual funds to the Birth to Three program. In 2020, changes to codes and billing practices showed a significant increase in reimbursement from commercial insurance which helped to offset the temporary elimination of the family fee. It is anticipated that commercial insurance reimbursement will continue to grow and be a consistent source of revenue in Birth to Three.

Creative Interventions thanks the Committee on Children for your time and consideration of this testimony and is hopeful that the Committee will be in support of the items described above.

Respectfully,

Scott Levine

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